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THE MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
LA COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE DU MANITOBA

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Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

Changes at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission

There is a new person at the helm of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

Jerry Woods has been appointed Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners replacing Janet Baldwin who has left the Board at the end of her second term. Ms Baldwin has been Chairperson since 2001.

Mr. Woods has been Vice-Chairman of the Commission for the past seven years. He is also the host of the Commission's Youth Conferences, which he describes as one of the highlights of his human rights work.

Jerry, being a proud member of the Bear Clan from the Couchiching First Nation and an advocate for Aboriginal employment, says that his focus is not solely on Aboriginal issues. "I am dedicated to improving the quality of life for all people," he says, adding that disability issues are among his concerns.

He is also committed to the continuation and expansion of the Commission's community consultations, which he believes help people reconnect with the Commission and their human rights. "Over the last few years we have made inroads into neighbourhood communities and have listened to their concerns and have valued their opinions." To date the Commission has consulted community groups on such topics as reviewing Manitoba's *Human Rights Code* to determine if social disadvantage should be added as a protected characteristic, and reviewing the relative strengths and weaknesses of our current legislation in combatting hate messages.

The Commission, in partnership with the University of Winnipeg, also held community meetings on police services in racialized communities in various Winnipeg neighbourhoods over the past year.

Mr. Woods has a background in the labour movement and his expertise is as a negotiator. He began working at 15 years old in the small town of Sapawe, Ontario where he was hired at the local sawmill. Over the following twenty-five years, he worked as a papermaker at the Boise Cascade Paper Mill in Fort Frances, Ontario. For twenty of those years he served as an officer with the local Union. In the late

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The Rights Connection
by Elliot Leven - Commissioner

Farewell to Janet

As readers may already know, Janet Baldwin has retired as Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, in order to devote more time to family and other pursuits. She truly will be missed by the Board of Commissioners and staff.

Janet was a wonderful Commission Chairperson, a position which is unique in its challenges. Not only did she fulfill this difficult role with intelligence and eloquence, but she did it all with warmth and a terrific sense of humour.

In her role of chairperson, Janet directed discussions at both Board and Executive Committee meetings. Sometimes, very complex cases were reviewed. Although Commissioners are often unanimous in their views, there can be differences and it was Janet's responsibility as Chairperson to moderate the discussion. With firmness and courtesy, she focused the exchange of ideas, which often helped the Commissioners reach consensus.

She also read and committed to memory an enormous volume of complex material. Other Commissioners always counted on her to remember the small details, which might have slipped their minds. Her mental filing system is truly amazing.

The Commission Chairperson also has the task of handling some miscellaneous matters between meetings. This can range from drafting letters to fielding media inquiries. The latter duty can be particularly difficult, but Janet delivered with both sensitivity and a keen, disciplined mind.

I'm sure I can speak for all Commissioners and staff in thanking Janet for her service above and beyond the call of duty, and in wishing her well in her travels and future adventures. Thank you Janet and good luck!

I would also like to note that the Commission is very fortunate in the selection of our new Chairperson – former Vice-Chairperson Jerry Woods. Though Jerry will have large shoes to fill, all Commissioners and staff know that he will do a terrific job.

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1980s he became a full time National Representative for the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union. He moved to Winnipeg in 1992 and retired in 2002.

Yvonne Peters, who has been a Commissioner since 2000, is replacing Mr. Woods as Vice-Chairperson. Ms Peters practices law in Winnipeg, providing a unique blend of legal consultation and policy development to unions, community groups, human rights organizations, the corporate sector and governments. She also chairs the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

Commissioners also changing

Commissioner Fausto Yadao also has retired from the Board. In 1972 Mr. Yadao began a long and successful career at Red River College and is the former Dean of Student Affairs. He has served on the Commission for seven years. Both Commissioners and staff thank him for his valuable contributions to the Board, the Issues and Communications Committee and the Youth Conferences.

Mzilikazi (Mzi) Ndlovu was appointed to the Board in 2006 and Joan Hay and Leonardo Aniceto were appointed in July of this year. Profiles of the new Commissioners will be featured in upcoming editions of the Connections Bulletin.

Janet Baldwin's pro-active approach to human rights

Janet Baldwin looks back over her seven years as Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission with satisfaction and pride.

"Many accomplishments have taken place since 2001," she says. "The Commission, for example, has dealt with substantial systemic complaints, which have been successfully resolved."

Janet Baldwin lighting a candle, the symbol of International Human Rights Day.

She cites such cases as the adoption of individual functional assessments rather than automatic standards by Driver and Vehicle Licensing in Manitoba and the successful mediation of complaints by the Elizabeth Fry Society against the Government of Manitoba, alleging systemic sex discrimination in the treatment of women incarcerated at the Portage Correctional Centre. Ms Baldwin emphasizes that the latter was the first mediation about the treatment of prisoners in a provincial system in Canada.

The high profile complaint filed by Rainbow Harmony Project against Camp Arnes also was resolved through mediation. This case involved the balancing of religious rights and the right to protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Ms Baldwin hopes that the remaining complaints about discriminatory barriers to accessing residency positions faced by international medical graduates will be resolved soon. Manitoba has already decided to allow international medical graduates the opportunity to participate on an equal basis with Canadian graduates in the first round of the matching process for residency positions, rather than only in the second round.

"We also embraced our mandate to promote human rights, through press releases, presentations to government committees and interventions in significant human rights cases at the Supreme Court of Canada," she says. In 2004 the Commission intervened in the *Reference re Same-Sex Marriage*, and in 2006 it intervened in the *Council of Canadians with Disabilities v. Via Rail.*

In addition, Ms Baldwin is very pleased with renewing the Commission's relationship with different communities in the province. The Commission's community consultations began in 2004.

Ms Baldwin admitted that her only regret during her two terms is that the Commission's proposed amendments to *The Code* have not yet passed, in particular the inclusion of social disadvantage as a protected ground, which she believes is a small step to address the issues of poverty and homelessness.

Another seminar added to Commission's Education Programs

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is once again offering the seminar *Recent Developments to Human Rights Law* to its list of education programs. This seminar, which will take place over two lunch periods, will consider the effect of recent court and tribunal decisions dealing with equality and human rights laws and identify emerging issues.

This series will be of interest to lawyers, law students, human resource professionals, and anyone who wishes to develop a better understanding of human rights legislation and its impact. The seminar will be delivered by Sarah Lugtig, Legal Counsel for the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

The Commission will continue to offer its other popular workshops which include: Human Rights in the Workplace, Harassment in the Workplace, Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace and How to Investigate a Human Rights Complaint. The dates and times of these workshops will be available on the Commission's website (www.gov.mb.ca/hrc) in early September.

For more information, or to register for this course, please call 945-3007